

Polaris Translations



Tank Minus One^[?]

Kumagawa Misogi's Bullet-Loaded Present

1

Heya, Kumagawa-kun. It's been a while.

You haven't been keeping in touch recently, have you?

Why haven't you been dying for me? Even though I wanted so very badly to see you.

Even though I'm the one wishing for your death the most.

Well, regardless of whether you die or not, it's true that I'm perfectly free to come visit you in your dreams on my own like this—but if you so blatantly try and avoid me, then even my feelings, the feelings of this Anshin'in-san, will get hurt.

You shouldn't hurt a girl's feelings, Kumagawa-kun.

Even you should learn a little more kindness—but, honestly, I don't know any human that's kinder than you are.

Of course, that's just a joke.

Did you think I was serious?

By the way, Kumagawa-kun, I heard you became the Student Council President for Suisou Academy? It seems like you finally have connections

to the organization known as the Student Council.

Surprisingly enough, doesn't it suit you?

And by that, I mean how you get to stand above other people—no, no, this isn't a joke. It's actually a rather serious hypothesis I'm making.

You yourself may deny it, but honestly, maybe someone who stands above others should be a Minus like you—personally, I consider standing above others to be equal to supporting them from below.

Perhaps, or rather, in the first place—seeing as you didn't refuse a position like that, and seeing as you still haven't left Suisou Academy yet, you knew that all along, didn't you, Kumagawa-kun?

Just kidding.

Well, it doesn't matter, whether or not you're suited to the Student Council, and whether or not you're suited to be Student Council President—right?

It's just that I'm worried about you.

Worried that you'll just stay at Suisou Academy like this—worried that Suisou Academy will become a comfortable place for you to stay.

I don't know how many schools you visited before that Suisou Academy on your journey to find a Skill for the sake of defeating me, to find a Skill Holder capable of defeating me, and I probably couldn't even count them. However, Kumagawa-kun, isn't this the first time you've stayed enrolled in one place for this long?

Hey, hey, don't tell me you gave up?

Or perhaps—you actually found one.

Finally, a Skill Holder capable of defeating me—if that really is the case, then I would really love if you would come and settle things already.

It's not exactly refreshing, being sealed like this in such a half-assed way—the two-fold seal of “All Fiction” and “Book Maker” was very interesting and had some flair to it, but it's about time for things to start

moving over at the place you could call my stronghold, Hakoniwa Academy.

So, Kumagawa-kun.

I don't know why you're working as the Student Council President at Suisou Academy, but I've decided to throw that academy into chaos.

I've decided to meddle a bit for you.

Doesn't that make you happy?

You know about my terminals that are scattered throughout the world, right—you know about my seven hundred million terminals, right? Naturally, there's a considerable number of terminals mixed in with that Suisou Academy of yours.

Among the 561 students that comprise the student body, exactly 80 of them are my terminals—ah, of course, I wouldn't do something so inelegant as attacking you with all 80 of them at once.

If I did that, I'd end up having to mount a picture of you on the wall in grief—but anyway, Kumagawa-kun.

Student Council President Kumagawa.

First, go and visit the student corresponding to Class 2-3 seat number 18—I've left a message with that girl. She's a shabby little kid without any significant power, but that's probably more suited for you anyway, and, of course, as long as I'm lending her one of my Skills, she should be able to put up that much resistance, so go and dote on her for a bit, will you?

My ultimate goal for this challenge, Kumagawa-kun, is for you to be thrown out of Suisou Academy—to strip you of the seat of Student Council President, and strike your name from the school register of this incomprehensible academy that you've settled down at for some reason.

That's my goal.

So do your best to prevent that from happening.

I have high expectations of you, Kumagawa-kun.

Even in my long life, there has never been another human like you—and I want to tell you not to betray my expectations, but saying something like that is beyond futile, so perhaps silence is golden after all.

Don't betray my expectations, pfft.

You've never lived up to anyone's expectations in your entire life, so there's no way you've ever not betrayed anyone.

■ ■

Kumagawa-kun had gotten Suisou Academy under his control in only a few days after he transferred in—no, it was slightly different from it being under his control, and perhaps it was totally different, but in any case, Kumagawa-kun had punished the previous Student Council President who had substantially and tyrannically controlled Suisou Academy, Jakago Aki, and had stolen that seat from her.

I, Sukinasaki Saki, had coincidentally been a witness at that scene of the crime, during that incident, and I'd ended up being tangled up with Kumagawa-kun and forced to take up a position as a member of the Student Council (General Affairs Manager)—ever since, Kumagawa-kun and I, just the two of us, had been managing the Suisou Academy Student Council Executive Committee (we were called stuff like the Two-Person Student Council), but, contrary to almost everyone's expectations, Kumagawa-kun was rather docile after taking up the position.

When you considered the uproar he made in class on the day he transferred in, this recent docility seemed all the more ominous—it seemed I was the only one thinking that, but in any case, Kumagawa-kun's state was different from how he was on that day.

On Monday, at what was once the headquarters of Suisou Academy but was now his private room, the Student Council office—Kumagawa-kun, without having once shown up to class, was reading Weekly Shonen Jump as always when I arrived after school.

「Saki-chan,」 he said.

In that manufactured tone of voice that made everything sound like a lie.

[Do you happen to know who seat number 18 in Class 2-3 is?]

“Eh...?”

[I’m pretty sure it’s a girl, at least.]

“Uh, uh-huh...”

What was the point of suddenly asking me that just as I entered?

“What’s with that? Kumagawa-kun, are you actually taking an interest in your underclassmen?” I managed to respond, even in my state of confusion.

[Whether they’re in my year or in the year below me, I take interest in most girls, you see. But no, I just thought I needed take responsibility as the Student Council president and get a grasp of every student in this academy.]

“.....”

Wanting to get a grasp of every student in the academy as the Student Council President was an admirable position to take, but even if that was the case, it was still weird to pinpoint a specific student and ask for their information.

It was nothing but ominous.

However, if we were talking about things that were nothing but ominous, then my classmate named Kumagawa Misogi himself was a transfer student that was nothing but ominous, so it was a bit ridiculous to say something like that now.

“Give me a little bit, okay? Really, it’s only a little,” I said, wracking my brains.

I’d gotten confused from being asked out of the blue, but it wasn’t that Kumagawa-kun had asked the question without any meaning or basis.

It’s because he knew that I was in the position to have a grasp of all the students in the academy that had been underneath the former Student

Council, the Jakago administration—that was why he asked.

Well, even so, without even needing to rely on me, he probably could have easily discovered who it was with just a little bit of effort, but I suppose that's what made him such a bothersome Student Council President.

"Class 2-3 seat number 18 would be, Teppou-san."

[Teppou-san?]

"Yeah. Teppou-san. Teppou Uchi-san. A celebrity—well, she's not actually on that level, but she's certainly well-known among the people that know her."

Well, frankly speaking, she was a person that was under the surveillance of the Jakago administration—as far as being on the first page of the "Black Blacklist" created by the Jakago administration's secretary, Sakanoue Kae-san.

Risk level 23, was her estimate.

However, she had an emergency level of 4, even lower than the average student, so she wasn't actually considered particularly important—even Former President Jakago had made the judgment that "She seems to be a bit of an oddball, but for now let's just keep an eye on her."

[Risk level 23, huh... Although, it's a little hard for me to understand what that number actually means.]

"The previous administration should've transferred all their data to you, though, Kumagawa-kun..."

[Oh, that? I burned all that up,] said Kumagawa-kun casually.

It was so casual that it almost sounded like a joke, but I was able to understand that it wasn't.

Although we hadn't known each other for very long, I knew that Kumagawa-kun wouldn't make a joke like that—no, perhaps I should say that I knew that, to him, reality itself was a joke.

[It's what they call, the 'burning of books and burying of scholars', right?]

"Um, no, I think that's something completely different..."

[Well, I just hate things like that, that are like strategy guides. Monster lists or item lists—I just hate them all. Not knowing what sort of enemy will appear is what makes life boring, right?]

"Yep, that's true.... Wait, huh?"

Weren't you usually supposed to end those sentences with, "...that's what makes life interesting, right?", was what I'd thought, but perhaps for Kumagawa-kun, boring things were actually what were more interesting.

He only felt a sense of satisfaction upon breaking the cartridge of a game he couldn't clear into pieces, and was elated by smashing the controller into the TV screen—that was the high school third-year known as Kumagawa Misogi.

[The truth is that I was thinking about burning down the school itself, but that was something I did before, so I decided against it.]

"....."

That one had to be a joke. I wanted to think that.

[So, Saki-chan. Shall we go? To Class 2-3 or whatever it is.]

"Or whatever it is'... I don't think Class 2-3 can be anything other than Class 2-3, though."

It seemed meaningless to try to be vague about that.

Although, perhaps Kumagawa-kun thought it was crazier to do things with meaning.

"Eh? Wait, wait, wait, Kumagawa-kun. What do you mean by 'go'? Are you going to go see Teppou-san? You're going to go see her? I still don't understand the situation at all... Do you possibly have zero intention of explaining this to me? What? Is there some business you have with Teppou-san?"

I was sure he'd play dumb and respond with something like, "I have business with most girls, you see," so I'd thrown out that question halfheartedly, but Kumagawa-kun actually responded to it.

[I'm not the one who has business with her,] he said. [In fact, it seems she's the one who has business with me—apparently she has a message for me.]

"....."

Although he answered, it didn't change the fact that I still had no idea what was going on.

"What? What does that mean? Are you saying that you and Teppou-san know each other?"

[No, no, we've never met before, and I don't know who she is at all, but it seems like she knows who I am.]

That made even less sense.

I mean, of course, there was no student in this academy that didn't know who Kumagawa-kun, the Student Council President, was, but the way Kumagawa-kun worded things had a different nuance to it.

If anything, seeing Kumagawa-kun's behavior—even in his usual carefree, unfathomable behavior, I didn't *not* feel a hint of some sort of resolve to go and see someone he had ties to.

That resolve surely would never have been seen through if it was anyone but me—and even if I pointed it out, I was sure Kumagawa-kun would play dumb as if something like that was completely natural.

[If you don't want to, you don't have to come with me. I don't expect there to be even the slightest bit of fun.]

"That's an awful declaration... It could even thoroughly uproot a person's motivations. No, I'll go, I'll come with you. Even though you forced me into this position, Kumagawa-kun, I'm still the General Affairs Manager of the Suisou Academy Student Council Executive Committee... So I have to accompany the President."

[Huhu. So you're saying, you have to accompany (*doukou*) me to observe my tendencies (*doukou*)?]

"Um, no, I never even came close to making a pun like that, though!?" I explained, flustered from the false pretext he gave. "...Besides, if you're going to say that, then it's not like I don't have any responsibility for making you into the Student Council President, either."

[Hmm. I don't really get it, stuff like having a sense of responsibility or a sense of duty. In the first place, I'm not going to see her as the Student Council president—it's just.]

Kumagawa-kun stood from his seat and opened the window behind him.

It seemed he planned on leaving not through the door but through the window—I couldn't predict even one step of his actions in the slightest.

[If I stay inattentive like this, I might end up being chased out of this academy—so I'm taking that challenge. I'm sure it'll be boring to play with Anshin'in-san again after all this time.]

Saying something that made no sense, Kumagawa-kun nimbly jumped out the window—by the way, we were on the fourth floor.

Of course, without following in his footsteps, I instead made to meet back up with him by leaving through the door and running through hallways and down staircases until I exited the school building.

Running through hallways was a violation of school rules that a member of the Student Council probably shouldn't have been making, but since the President was someone like that, you'll have to forgive me.

■ ■

Regarding Class 2-3 seat number 18, Teppou Uchi-san, Kumagawa-kun had refused to listen to any information besides her name, but at this rate it wouldn't make for a very entertaining story, so before we visit her classroom I'll disclose a little more about her.

Teppou Uchi.^[?]

They say that names and natures do often agree, but in this case, it was more likely that it was because she was born into that family and given that name—she was probably strongly influenced by her name, which was why she joined the Marksmanship Club.

Or rather, as of right now, Teppou-san was the only member in Suisou Academy's Marksmanship Club—but the fact that even though this club, which was fairly minor on a national scale, managed to stay afloat without being crushed by the Jakago administration or being forced to disband was proof of that girl's marksmanship skills.

Whether it was pistol shooting, rifle shooting, or clay pigeon shooting, she produced excellent results even at world tournaments—not national tournaments, but world tournaments. As someone who was attending this school, this could sound like I was bragging, but Suisou Academy was one of Japan's foremost prestigious schools, so students that excelled were treated that much more favorably.

Of course, it was unusual to see a high school girl devote herself so one-sidedly to marksmanship, so within the academy, she was considered a bit of an oddball, and was straight up just isolated—that was the cause for the difference in her risk level and her emergency level.

Former President Jakago fundamentally did not concern herself with people who didn't find the need to be in cliques—well, I could see why, because when you thought about the “Skill” she had, there was almost no reason to fear her.

Even though her expertise in marksmanship wasn't considered particularly dangerous by the likes of Former Secretary Sakanoue or Former Vice President Renpei, it was still a point of concern—well, even so, what Teppou-san mostly engaged with on school grounds was digital marksmanship, so she was safe in that sense.

Although, being able to call her safe was just my own estimate.

So allowing such a “safe student” to meet with someone so extremely dangerous with a risk level of infinity like Kumagawa-kun was honestly something I was rather reluctant to do—I liked having a peaceful academy. I was a high schooler that loved peace and quiet—that was who I, Sukinasaki Saki, was.

The fact that I cooperated with the Jakago administration, even unwillingly, was because, for better or for worse, Former President Jakago and the other former officers did bring about peace to Suisou Academy—but now.

But now, Kumagawa-kun was the Student Council President, and while he had properly taken over the peace that Jakago-san had created, I knew it wouldn't last forever.

Or rather, in the first place, I didn't think Kumagawa-kun planned on being the Student Council president forever—

[...It appears to be locked,] he said.

We had arrived at the 5th floor of the next school building, the hallway in front of Class 2-3, and Kumagawa-kun had attempted to enter the classroom through the front door, but he'd been denied entry with the resistance of the lock.

"Oh my. I guess everyone from this class went home already?" I said.

I made my voice sound as natural as I could.

I had the feeling that this wouldn't do anything but delay any upcoming developments, but I was thankful at the very least to be able to keep Kumagawa-kun and Teppou-san from meeting for now.

If she wasn't in the classroom, then the normal thing to do would be to visit the Marksmanship Club room where she was likely to be, but since Kumagawa-kun had refused my offer of information, he didn't know what club Teppou-san was in.

I would still tell him if he asked, but Kumagawa-kun probably wouldn't ask me as part of his doctrine—no, I could hardly think that Kumagawa-kun had anything as extreme as a "doctrine".

"For the room to be all locked up like this, the class must have had a very diligent person on day duty. So, Kumagawa-kun, let's go back to the Student Council office. We still have a lot of work to do—"

That was a lie.

When he took up the position of Student Council President, I hadn't expected it at all from him, but unexpectedly, as if he'd had prior experience, Kumagawa-kun properly completed his Student Council President duties.

He did his work in an unpleasant, indescribable manner that could really only be described as "completed", and it was a very unpleasant manner from the point of view of a General Affairs Manager, but even so, even if the work couldn't be considered splendid, I couldn't deny that Kumagawa-kun was truly a hardworking person.

That meant that there was absolutely no work piled up in the Student Council office at all, but either way, I felt that I needed to say it for the sake of my livelihood, for the sake of getting Kumagawa-kun to go back, but my judgment was too slow.

When I'd said that, Kumagawa-kun had turned to me, asking, 「Eh? Did you say something, Saki-chan?」 as he destroyed the door to the classroom of Class 2-3. The part with the keyhole had been quite literally screwed in by a large screw, piercing through to the inside of the classroom.

How should I say this.

It was an act of destruction with no indecision, no hesitation at all—it was a deed that made it seem like locks were *meant* to be destroyed and not simply opened.

Even if Kumagawa-kun had actually had the key to the classroom in his uniform pocket, and even if it took the same amount of time to take out the key and take out a screw, I had the absolute confidence that he would still go with the screw. It was true absurdity.

“No... I didn't say anything. Even if I did say something, it was only a little bit, okay? Really, it's only a little...”

Finding it ridiculous to try and argue about the destruction, and finding it ridiculous to even bother warning him, I simply shook my head.

“But I don't think breaking the door would help. If the door was locked, then that would naturally mean that there's no one in the classroom...”

「But, it seems that's not the case. See?」 he said.

Speaking like that, Kumagawa-kun violently kicked through the broken door with a grin on his face and entered the classroom.

“Wait, wait a second, Kumagawa-kun!”

In a panic, I followed after him.

However, as I'd assumed, the classroom was unoccupied. In this classroom that was slightly wider as a characteristic unique to Suisou Academy classrooms, there was no one, except—except for what was in the center of the classroom.

Except for the corpse of a female student.

“Eh...?”

I was shaking. Of course I was shaking. I was shaking all over.

Kumagawa-kun, though as calm as ever, stopped for the time being with the corpse in front of him.

The corpse of a female student—that corpse was seated on a chair at a desk in the center of the classroom. In one hand was a large revolver, with the muzzle of the gun pointing languidly at the floor—more than half of the head had been blown away.

Half of the other side of the classroom had been dyed in red, surely due to the contents of her head having splattered across it—it was probably impossible to deduce everything from this state of affairs, and this was just from an amateur's viewpoint, but it was very clear what had happened.

She had placed the muzzle of the gun at her own temple and pulled the trigger—we were at the scene of a firearm suicide.

But a firearm suicide?

In Japan?

When discussing the problems within a society with gun rights, then the high crime rate went without saying, but I'd heard that the suicide rate also drastically jumped, too—but Japan was not one of those societies.

And a firearm suicide occurring at a school, inside a classroom? There had to be a limit to how unthinkable this combination was—much like how there had to be a limit to how attractive a person's gap could be.

[Saki-chan.]

Without recoiling even the slightest bit from the stench of blood that permeated the classroom, and actually even widening his smile, Kumagawa-kun pointed at the suicide victim.

[Is that actually Teppou-san?]

“Eh...?”

Even if you asked that.

Even if you asked me that, this was a firearm suicide—a suicide that involved pointing the gun at the temple would perhaps leave it in a better condition than if she had put the barrel of the gun in her mouth, but even so, half the head had been blown away.

In addition to that, they say that living humans and dead humans have completely different facial expressions, so there was no way I'd be able to judge a student's face when it was like that.

“I do know what Teppou-san's face looks like... But in that state, it might be... a little hard for me. Really, it's only a little...”

[It's true that it might be hard to tell from this distance. Then, try coming a little closer.]

With that, Kumagawa-kun began to walk away—no, no, I didn't mean that I couldn't tell because I was at a distance, but that I couldn't tell because her head was blown off.

Following behind Kumagawa-kun, who apparently felt no physical disgust upon getting closer to a corpse, I soon reached the desk of that female student.

The stench felt less like the stench of blood and more like the stench of meat—although, since I generally wore a mask at all times, the stench didn't bother me that much.

What did bother me was the state of the corpse, which I could only describe as grotesque. It was an intense visual, as if it were trying to show off the contents of a person's body—although, if I said it like that, it could sound like I was disrespecting the dead.

But that was what I truly felt.

[So? Can you tell?]

"No, like I was about to say, the head is.... Ah, but..."

What had entered my line of sight was not her ruptured head, but the reason why that head had been splatted across the classroom—the large-caliber pistol in her right hand.

More precisely, the wrist of that hand.

The right wrist.

Teppou-san always, as far as I was aware, wore a characteristic wristband on her right wrist—I'd assumed it was some sort of charm as a Marksmanship Club member, like a jinx.

I didn't know if I should say, contrary to my expectations, or, just as I expected.

The wristband that I remembered seeing—was in fact being worn on the suicide victim's right wrist. My level of information hadn't been enough to know they were dog tags, but for now, it was enough to make a temporary judgment.

"Yeah."

It was probably okay to say it now.

“It’s Teppou-san... I think.”

[Ah, is that so. She’s quite a cute girl, isn’t she? I just love a girl that can show me her brains as soon as we meet.]

And, saying that.

Kumagawa-kun put his right hand on her head—or rather, he plunged it straight into her head. It almost seemed like he was just drawing lots to change seats in the classroom with how casually he touched the corpse.

However, I couldn’t tell if me being frightened of that grotesque corpse was more disrespectful, or if Kumagawa-kun not being disturbed in the least in front of the corpse was more disrespectful.

And while I was thinking about that.

[—‘All Fiction’.]

The corpse stopped being a corpse.

The head, which had had more than half of it blown off, no longer had even a hair out of place—not a trace of the blood and flesh that had been scattered across the classroom remained.

Everything inside the classroom had “returned” to its original state.

“.....!”

No matter how many times I saw it, it made me shudder.

This was Kumagawa-kun’s Skill.

A Minus that could make everything as if it never happened.

“All Fiction”.

It was with this inarguable Skill that allowed Kumagawa-kun to dethrone Jakago-san from the position of Student Council President, with Suisou

Academy under her control.

「I made it so that this girl's firearm suicide never happened—and so, good afternoon, and nice to meet you, Teppou-san,」 said Kumagawa-kun, greeting what had just been a corpse with a wide smile. 「As I'm sure you've heard, I've come to see you.」

“...Upupupu.”

She laughed.

With her face having gone back to its “original state”, making even facial recognition possible, the girl smiled.

Class 2-3, seat number 18.

The only member of the Marksmanship Club, and a worldwide ace.

Teppou Uchi smiled.

“Thought I'd be able to catch you off-guard if I was a corpse when we first met—but you didn't lose your cool even once, huh. Just like Anshin'in-san said, you're one crazy guy. Upupupupu.”

“.....”

This personality—it was an attitude that would never have you suspect that, just seconds ago, she'd been dead, having lost half her head.

It was this insolent personality that incurred the hostility of the former administration's staff member Renpei Iya, who was said to have been more adamant than diamonds—but it seemed a personality like that didn't bother Kumagawa-kun in the slightest. There was no sign that his mood had been affected by being addressed so casually.

...But, who was Anshin'in-san?

The name (?) had come up before, as well, so was it someone they both knew?

「Ahahaha. Should I have screamed really loudly instead? For a moment I was thinking this would be the start of a mystery novel, though. Well, a

firearm suicide in a locked room would be really cliché,] said Kumagawa-kun.

With the same tone of voice as he always used—whether it was in front of a corpse, or speaking with the living Teppou-san, his attitude really never changed.

Perhaps it was the same thing to Kumagawa-kun, whether you were alive or dead—or rather, perhaps he only went to places where “being alive” and “being dead” were all mixed up together.

However, Teppou-san’s stance of killing herself and lying in wait in the classroom just to surprise Kumagawa-kun was—well, it was on the same level of abnormality.

Her risk level.

For it to be 23—it was absolutely not high enough.

It could even be the same as Kumagawa-kun—infinity.

“Upupu.”

Teppou-san laughed again.

And then she took the large-caliber revolver in her hand and pointed it right in front of her, towards Kumagawa-kun. Despite being a member of the Marksmanship Club, she had no hesitation in pointing a gun at a person—in fact, from watching her fluid motions, I could tell that Teppou-san was clearly used to pointing guns at people.

“Whatever. I’m the type of gal that’s more a culprit than a victim, y’see. I prefer killing over being killed, and I’d rather live than die.”

She would rather live than die.

Those words sounded incredibly questionable.

At the very least, compared to her saying that she preferred killing.

Under the Jakago administration, even though she was lacking in submissiveness and had abilities that could not be ignored, what Teppou-san wielded was a digital pistol. So for that reason, assuming that it wouldn't be a problem even if she showed animosity towards the Student Council, Sakanoue-san and Renpei-san had barely decided to lay down their arms, but thinking about it now, it was incredibly mistaken for them to show such restraint.

Because right now, Teppou-san was no doubt pointing a real large-caliber pistol with live ammunition and showing real murderous intent at Kumagawa-kun.

It was a revolver whose possession would surely be regulated overseas, and obviously in Japan—and considering the ruptured state of Teppou-san's head just moments prior, its deadliness had already been proven.

"Mm... By the way," she said.

And with that, Teppou-san faced me for the first time. No, it wasn't exactly right to say she faced me. If anything, her face was still pointed at Kumagawa-kun, and she shifted her gaze to barely place me with her field of vision.

In short, she glanced at me.

"Who... is this senpai? Didn't Anshin'in-san tell you to come alone?"

[She didn't say anything like that. Well, even if she had, it's not like I would actually follow that—this is Sukinasaki Saki-san. My classmate, and for today, my partner.]

Being introduced as his partner was rather irritating. Even though you could've just normally introduced me as your classmate, or the Student Council General Affairs Manager...

No, but, could I really call this feeling "irritation"? I felt like it was subtly different... In the first place, the reason it "felt unpleasant somehow" was because I knew that Kumagawa-kun didn't see me as someone he could put his faith in, let alone call me his partner.

Kumagawa-kun. Kumagawa Misogi.

He'd probably never trusted a single person in his entire life, and he probably never would for the rest of his life—of course.

Of course, for Kumagawa-kun who spoke all his lines as if they were fabricated, the one who trusted him the least was none other than Kumagawa-kun himself.

"I see... Sukinasaki-senpai, huh. I dunno her."

Upupu, laughed Teppou-san.

Well, I had no intention of acting superior or conceited with a worldwide ace in front of me, but considering I was still unmistakably someone who was older than her, she really showed no sign of showing any respect.

Perhaps I should actually be glad that she was calling me "senpai", even as lip service.

"It's like, who the hell are you? Sorry, but can you leave me and Kumagawa-senpai alone? You don't belong here."

"....."

Being told something like that outright was actually relieving, and perhaps even refreshing, but if I was going to bother saying "Yes, very well, I'll do as you say" and returning to the Student Council office at this point, I wouldn't have come in the first place. I came to monitor Kumagawa-kun's behavior, after all. Even if I didn't belong, even if I looked foolish, I had the obligation to remain in this classroom—it was a moral obligation, but regardless of anything, I couldn't just leave Kumagawa-kun, of all people, in front of a kouhai with a personality like this. I'm sure nobody who had a regular level of sensitivity would be able to leave him.

"Apologies, Teppou-san. Since I've come as part of my Student Council duties, I won't be able to leave. So let me stay here a little bit longer. Really, it's only a little."

[Part of your Student Council duties?] asked Kumagawa-kun, tilting his head.

I wanted to say that it wouldn't do if the Student Council President himself

had no knowledge, but in this case, my duties were “Student Council President observation”, after all.

It was a job description that the General Affairs Manager of the former Student Council, Kejukuri Tou-san, had surely never experienced, but for officers of the current Student Council, it was an exceedingly important job.

“Haah. Well, whatever. If I just think of you as one extra desk being added to the classroom, then it doesn’t even bother me that much. Anyway, Kumagawa-senpai.”

As she said, she lost interest in me in an instant—or rather, she probably didn’t have all that much interest in me in the first place—and called out to Kumagawa-kun.

There was absolutely no sign that she would lower her pistol.

Considering the recoil from something so large-caliber, there was no way a girl would be able to shoot it using one hand, and before that, a pistol that large had to have considerable mass—if I had to describe it, it was like taking a dumbbell and keeping it held up, but really, her stance didn’t change at all.

At this point, it had to be a completely different technique from marksmanship—Teppou-san was more of an oddball and a nonconformist than I’d understood from her while under the Jakago administration.

This was careless of me.

I’ll sincerely reflect on this.

“It’s true that Anshin’in-san entrusted a message with me that’s meant for you, but you didn’t really expect me to just tell you what that message was, did you?”

[Well, who knows? I can be more optimistic than you might think, and I didn’t *not* expect you to just tell me. I didn’t not not not not not not expect you,] said Kumagawa-kun.

I couldn’t tell what he actually meant—that was the usual Kumagawa-kun

for you. Even though they were meeting for the first time, it seemed there were indeed some sort of ties between them, and yet Kumagawa-kun didn't change in the slightest.

You could even say he had some really strong self-control, but that wasn't quite it. It was possible that Kumagawa-kun didn't have anything like a self or a heart that needed to be controlled in the first place.

“Upupu. Unfortunately, I'm not like some Villager A in an RPG. In this world, there are no such convenient things like NPCs that'll give you the information you need to clear the game.”

[Ahaha. But aren't Anshin'in-san's terminals made for that purpose?]

“...That's the worst insult you could give to the likes of us.”

Teppou-san's eyes narrowed. She seemed exceedingly displeased.

With the way things were going, it seemed like an atmosphere where she would pull the trigger of her revolver—I didn't really understand the subject, but it seemed correct to assume that Kumagawa-kun had provoked her somehow. However, for her to be so simplistically affected by provocations like that, I felt that Teppou-san was rather unstable.

“You wanna die? Kumagawa-senpai.”

[Of course I don't want to die. Definitely not.]

Kumagawa-kun responded, composed to the very end.

Even if the pistol pointed at them was just a toy gun, I doubted a normal person would be able to stay that composed.

[So? Then, what should I do to be able to receive that message from you? Don't act all haughty and just tell me.]

“I'm not trying to act haughty at all, of course.”

[If it's something that can be resolved with money, then just say so. I have plenty of money to spare.]

As if that could be true.

I didn't know about the Jakago administration, but without anyone employed as Treasurer in the current Kumagawa administration, no form of fundraising had taken place as of yet.

"It ain't money."

Fortunately, that was Teppou-san's response.

"And we aren't exchanging anything. I just want to test you a bit, to see if you're really a good enough opponent to be so obsessed about Anshin'in-san like this."

[.....]

"Or rather, to be honest I'm actually really doubting that that's true. Anshin'in-san lives her life pretty halfheartedly sometimes, so this could be one of her rare miscalculations—that's why I'll have you go through a test."

With that, Teppou-san finally pointed the revolver away from Kumagawa-kun. And, with one fluid motion, she swung out the cylinder of the gun, allowing the bullets inside to roll across the desk.

There were six bullets inside.

It had been fully loaded.

The bullet she had used to blow her own head off had probably "returned" when Kumagawa-kun activated his "All Fiction"—it was a pretty vague way to make things consistent, and sometimes it was even hard to agree with, but it would actually be a miracle if you could agree with everything that came from a Skill used by Kumagawa-kun.

"Now... Kumagawa-senpai. Do you know how to handle a gun?"

[Unfortunately, I've neither seen nor touched such a dreadful thing in my entire life. If a gun showed up when I was watching Tuesday Suspense Theatre, I would just change the channel.]

Another unbelievable statement.

How many years had even passed since that show had stopped airing,

Tuesday Suspense Theatre?

"Is that so. Well, it doesn't matter to me whether you're telling the truth or lying. You should at least be able to cock the hammer back and pull the trigger, right?"

As she said that, she picked up one of the bullets on the desk with her fingers (although, seeing bullets rolling around on top of a school desk was truly a surreal feeling. Since it was right after seeing a corpse, it felt like my senses were being numbed, too), and then she put it in the cylinder.

And then, after she gave the cylinder a powerful spin with her left hand, she returned it back into to the barrel. Teppou-san then handed that revolver out to Kumagawa-kun opposite her.

It was like the pose you took when you were offering scissors to someone, but when we were dealing with a gun instead of scissors, it was most certainly disconcerting no matter which way you pointed it when you were handing it over.

However, Kumagawa-kun accepted it as if it were the most normal thing in the world. With the same carefree manner as if he were taking a pack of tissues being distributed on some street corner, Kumagawa-kun took it in his dominant hand.

Er, that is, he took it with his right hand, seeing as it was pretty doubtful if he had something like a dominant hand in the first place. I'd found it appropriate to assume that his right hand was his dominant hand because he took it with his right hand, but in the first place, Kumagawa-kun was the kind of person where it was questionable whether or not he had "anything".

"Upupu," laughed Teppou-san, after the gun had gotten completely in Kumagawa-kun's possession, with her own hands empty. "It's Russian Roulette. See if you can stay alive, a'ight?"

"Wait..."

The one who spoke up was me.

From Teppou-san's perspective, it would be as if the extra desk that had

been added had started making a fuss (what kind of supernatural phenomenon was that?), but I couldn't just stay silent.

Russian Roulette.

Well, I didn't think it was particularly a game I needed to explain—rather than Tuesday Suspense Theatre, it was something often seen in Hollywood movies, where you put a single bullet into the magazine of a revolver-type gun and spin the cylinder so you don't know when that bullet will shoot out. You then point the gun at your temple and pull the trigger.

Rather than a game, was it more of a test of courage?

In no uncertain terms, it was a reckless way of playing with suicide—of course, if the bullet shot out when you pulled the trigger, then you'd obviously turn into a corpse with a ruptured head, just as Teppou-san had been before.

If there's the case where you play with just one person, then there's also the case where you play with two, taking turns pulling the trigger—just from simple calculations, if you played this with a revolver that could normally hold six bullets, then you'd have a one-sixth chance of going to the next world, and a five-sixths chance of staying alive.

Just from that, it almost sounded like it wasn't all that risky, but when you considered the fact that it was your life that was at stake, then the risk level went far beyond the expected value.

At the very least, you probably did not want to hear a demand like this after suddenly being handed a gun.

"Upupu," went Teppou-san again, as if she were just some mischievous kid. "Any human who can't survive odds like these aren't qualified to face off against Anshin'in-san, is what I think—so how about it, Kumagawa-senpai?"

[Hm, I get it,] said Kumagawa-kun, moving as if he were inspecting the gun he'd been given. [So it's a matter of pulling the trigger and seeing if the bullet shoots out or doesn't shoot out—a one-half probability.]

"....."

“.....”

Kumagawa-kun had just said something exceedingly stupid.

It was a probability calculation that was basically the equivalent of declaring that he had no mathematical knowledge whatsoever. If you misinterpret the meaning of “hit or miss”, then I suppose you could end up with a misunderstanding like this...

Well, when it came down to a bet with a one-half chance of surviving versus a bet with a five-sixths chance of surviving, obviously one-half was riskier, so perhaps it could work as a plus in this situation. I'd managed to guess that Kumagawa-kun had some sort of obsession with this mysterious person named “Anshin'in-san”, but even so, there was surely no way he'd take on gamble with a one-half chance of instant death.

Well, he probably wouldn't even with a one-sixth chance... Was what I'd been thinking, about to give a sigh of relief, but then.

[I guess it's something like this? Khorosho!] he said.

Because it was Russian Roulette, Kumagawa-kun brought out a Russian word before pointing the gun to his temple and pulling the trigger.

The probability was five-sixths. Otherwise—one-sixth.

If things had proceeded in a reasonable direction, then this would have been a scene where Teppou-san and I ended up being shocked at Kumagawa-kun's unbelievable courage—but instead.

Bang!

Went the gun.

An earsplitting sound echoed through the isolated classroom of Class 2-3—and the contents of Kumagawa-kun's head showered down like rain onto me, who was right next to him.

■ ■

Heya, sorry about that.

Kumagawa-kun, it seems there's been a mistake.

When I spoke to one of my seven hundred million terminals, the one named Teppou Uchi, I'd only asked her to simply convey the message I'd left with her to you when you came to see her—and I don't remember if I told her to get you to play with her for a bit, and if it's a matter of whether or not I said so then I probably did say so, but it seems she really put you through the wringer.

Well, the fact that my terminals have their own little idiosyncrasies like that is really something to celebrate, so I hope you can forgive me—I mean, it's not like you shooting yourself in the head means that it's Game Over or anything.

If it turned into something like that, then I'd give that Teppou girl a good scolding. I'd even think about stripping her down naked and offering her up to you.

Um, like I said, it's not Game Over yet, okay?

That was just an example, an example.

But you were pretty careless, Kumagawa-kun.

Before you pulled the trigger, shouldn't you have checked the table that Teppou was sitting at? After she swung out and discharged the bullets from the revolver, and then after she put a single bullet back inside, the remaining five bullets that should have been rolling around weren't there, right?

No, they weren't there.

But it doesn't mean that they disappeared, the way your "All Fiction" can make them disappear—she just moved them somewhere else.

As for where she moved them, I shouldn't even need to explain it, right?

The cylinder of the revolver, of course. Basically, when you pulled the trigger, the magazine had once again been fully-loaded.

In other words, the Russian Roulette probability, the probability of Kumagawa Misogi committing suicide, went from one-sixth to six out of six. And, reducing that fraction, it turned into a probability of one.

That was the Skill I lent out to Teppou Uchi when I entrusted my message to her—the Skill, “Lady Guitarist”.^[?]

It’s a Skill where, even without touching the gun, and even without touching the bullets, she’s capable of reloading—there’s also a more complex way of using it, but that doesn’t really matter here. Someone like her doesn’t have the ability to fully make use of that Skill, anyway. What matters is that she took that Skill and used it on you to make you commit suicide.

To make you commit suicide even though you feared suicide so much, that Teppou girl really is something, don’t you think?

Just think like that and forgive her.

Well, if anything, this is just a side show, so go on and revive with “All Fiction” already and continue your conversation with her.

Just letting you know, if you can’t get her to convey my message, then you’ll never hear the sound of the starting pistol, okay? For you, someone like her isn’t even an opponent, let alone an enemy.

I’d like for you to not forget that, in the end, Teppou Uchi is just a character I deployed to start you off—she’s obviously not an NPC, and she’s not Villager A, either, but unfortunately, she’s not the game’s protagonist.

Even though she’s not an NPC.

She’s not a player, either.

Anyway, it doesn’t matter to me if you betray my expectations, and it’s really more like, make sure you entertain me. So don’t disappoint me, okay?

After you revive from this, Kumagawa-kun, I think that Teppou girl is going to force some unreasonable demands onto you, so deal with that as best as you can.

Once you do, it'll be the start of the game for the first time.

Right now, you're just a player stuck in the game's tutorial, you know? That in itself is pretty fun to watch, but as the gamemaster, it's a bit of a disappointment.

And so, I, Anshin'in-san, am looking forward to your efforts from this point on.

Good luck.

■ ■

Kumagawa-kun, who had had his head blown off, or rather, who had personally blown his own head off, did not collapse onto the floor of the classroom, and instead used his personal Skill "All Fiction" to return to his original state—even the shower of blood that had rained down upon me was as if it "never happened".

Basically, he made the entire occurrence of the gun firing in Russian Roulette as if it "never happened"—that was probably it, which meant that by this point, life and death really were jumbled up.

My senses were turning really weird.

[Ooh...] went Kumagawa-kun.

As expected, he woke up in a rather melancholy way. I thought that, because he'd had his head blown in, of course he wouldn't be able to revive full of energy, but it seemed that wasn't the problem.

[Anshin'in-san really is a prankster... Every time we see each other, I come to like her more and more. That's why I don't want to see her.]

It made no sense to me.

It seemed it was the same for Teppou-san, as well.

"...? Kumagawa-senpai, did you just meet with Anshin'in-san? Right now, while you were dead?"

[Yep. Because I died, a forced encounter event was triggered—you sure did something mean, didn't you, Teppou-san. Secretly loading in all the bullets before I could notice.]

Saying as such, Kumagawa-kun flipped out the cylinder of the revolver, just as Teppou-san had done earlier. When I looked, I could certainly see that all six bullets were inside, with not a single one missing.

I didn't really understand the reasoning, but it seemed that just before Kumagawa-kun pulled the trigger, Teppou-san used some sort of Skill to reload the gun—in other words, a Skill that allowed you to reload bullets.

I mean, considering she had managed to blow in Kumagawa-kun's head with it, I shouldn't be saying this, but—what a plain Skill.

Even if there was probably no Skill in existence that could match Kumagawa-kun's "All Fiction" that could "make everything as if it never happened", it was still a cheap trick that couldn't even compare to the villainous, boundless Skills possessed by the members of the Jakago Student Council—

"Ain't it all right? Even if you die, you'll just come back to life, right? Upupupu."

[That's right, I'll come back to life—although, strictly speaking, it's not coming back to life, but making 'dying' as if it 'never happened', okay? Well, that's really just a matter of how you interpret it.]

Kumagawa-kun put the cylinder back and placed it on the desk. To be able to so easily return a loaded revolver to your opponent had to be an act of boldness as well.

[So? What did you want to accomplish with this Russian Roulette? Were you just trying to prove that I was an idiot for not being able to see through your trick? Because if you were, you're totally off the mark.]

Kumagawa-kun shrugged his shoulders and continued.

「For me, even if you didn't use a trick like that, I would've still pulled the trigger on a Russian Roulette even with all six bullets in it. So what you just did was unnecessary and a waste of time. It was like praying for rain on the night before a typhoon.」

“Praying for rain?”

At those words, my jaw tightened.

Because, even though by now it had “never happened”, it was certainly true that a shower of blood had rained down upon me—if his sarcasm was including that as well, then he had a considerably awful personality. Don't point your sarcasm towards someone who's just standing next to you.

“Upupu, it was just a performance. What I wanted to say was, as long as I'm borrowing this Skill from Anshin'in-san, there's no way I can lose at Russian Roulette.”

There was no hint of shrinking back from Kumagawa-kun's words—in fact, she even seemed proud. She had a triumphant expression on her face.

“Although it's true that someone like you will play Russian Roulette no matter what the probability is... Maybe not with all six bullets, but you'd even play a five-bullet Russian Roulette. But you're the only one who'd do that, right?”

It's just you, she said.

And here, Teppou-san turned to me. She leaned back and placed her weight against the back of the chair to balance it on one leg, using it as a pivot to spin the chair around like a swivel chair.

“If you had a five-sixths chance of winning, would you go for it?”

“.....”

I stayed silent.

I mean, there was no way I would, so I could simply answer that there was no way I would, but right now, it seemed to me like Teppou-san

wasn't really just asking a yes or no question.

That's why, after some hesitation, I answered like this.

"It depends on how much is at stake... I suppose?"

"Upupu. And that means?"

She sure was cheerful.

It seemed that this impertinent kouhai had finally taken an interest in me—but I wasn't happy about that in the least.

"So, like, it's a matter of the circumstances or the odds—if I'm betting my life in this gamble, then I'd go for it if I could gain something worth the same as my life, or maybe even worth more than my life... I guess I wouldn't have any choice but to go for it?" I said, still considering the question. "For example, like this—if the lives of my friends or family were at stake. If I won at Russian Roulette, I could save a friend's life. If it was something like that, then I wouldn't have any choice but to play. Of course, if the odds weren't good for me, then I'd be a little hesitant, but if it's Russian Roulette—"

I'd go for it.

Most people would, wouldn't they?

[I'd do it even if the odds weren't great, personally. If my friend's life were at stake,] said Kumagawa-kun, smiling as if he'd just told a lie, but let's just ignore what he just said.

"Right," said Teppou-san, disregarding Kumagawa-kun and nodding at my opinion. "Even if it wasn't something so convenient—if, say, you could get a huge debt forgiven if you survive at Russian Roulette, I think most people would take on a challenge like that."

It would boil down to the odds, again—even if it weren't debt forgiveness but winning it as a reward. If there was an event where you could win ten billion yen for surviving in Russian Roulette (obviously it would be illegal), well, I personally wouldn't go for it, but even if "most people" was an exaggeration, it wouldn't be weird if there were people that did go for it.

There's a thought experiment known as the St. Petersburg paradox—to put it simply, let's say there's a game where you can get 10 yen if you win at rock-paper-scissors. In this game, if you can win twice in a row, then you can get double the money, or 20 yen. And if you win a third time, it'll double again for a reward of 40 yen.

In other words, it's a game where, the longer you can keep up your winning streak, the more money you can win. And now, the question is, how much should you charge a person to play this game? That's the St. Petersburg paradox.

Well, it's a pretty simple question that only seems complex because the name of the problem is almost longer than the problem itself, but as a matter of fact, it's a fairly difficult question to answer.

That's the reason this thought experiment is referred to as a paradox, because from a probabilistic perspective, the probability of someone winning infinitely is not necessarily zero—when it came to the winnings for this doubling game, we don't even need to compare it to the “Multiplication Liquid” episode of Doraemon to imagine that the winnings would end up going astronomically high if you continued to win.

In other words, if you calculate it with the formula for the expected value, the answer ends up becoming infinity—so, no matter how high a fee you charge to play the game, if you take into account the expected value, you'll always be running at a loss.

Even if your life is at stake.

...Of course, this is all just in theory, and realistically, it's a severely disadvantageous bet to make—I'll leave out all the reasoning behind that, because the point I'm trying to make is that, if the rewards or the dividends become too high, then the validity of the gamble itself becomes uncertain.

Right now, what Teppou-san was probably asking about was not the validity of Russian Roulette, but about what object, or sum of money, was worth exchanging for the life of a human.

...Of course, there were people who would just play on a whim, without betting anything—people like Kumagawa-kun who would dare to play

Russian Roulette while thinking, “It would be totally hilarious if I pulled the trigger even if I don’t gain anything if I survive”. But that really just meant that Kumagawa-kun didn’t consider his own life to have any value.

Q. In a gamble with your life at stake,
what prize would you want to receive in exchange?

A. []

...What someone would write for their answer really depended on their own personality, but I wonder? Even if it was a joke, if there were a person who could write in their answer in that answer field, I’d be hard-pressed to say that they were living a happy, fulfilling life at all.

“Upupu. Well, let’s put aside the certainty of that for now—if I had to say it, Russian Roulette itself is really a malicious game of luck. The problem is, no matter what reason you have, no matter what you need, once you start playing Russian Roulette—as long as you’re staking your life, it becomes a game that you absolutely gotta win,” said Teppou-san.

Well, what she was saying was fairly obvious, and there was nothing I could object to, or wanted to object to, but it was very clear that she was trying to hint at something, and I couldn’t help but harbor doubts at that attitude of hers.

“That’s right, Kumagawa-senpai. In this world, there are battles that you absolutely can’t lose—battles that you absolutely don’t want to lose, right?”

Here, Teppou-san once again rotated the chair balancing on one leg, turning back to face Kumagawa-kun—it seemed that her speaking to me was nothing more than a way to push the conversation in the direction she wanted.

In the end, she wasn’t going for me.

She was going for Kumagawa-kun.

“You’re a pro at losing, and you pass yourself off never having won a single time since you were born—so it should be undeniable in this world that there are game states you just can’t get through. Or don’t tell me that you think you’ll be able to get through anything with how you’ve always done, by achieving your goals through losing, all the while smiling like an idiot?”

[...Well, who knows?]

Kumagawa-kun did not shrink back.

Unlike me, there was no sign that he felt any of the threatening aura present in Teppou-san’s words—he simply allowed that malice to pass through him, as if playing dumb.

It was the same when he spoke with the former Student Council President, Jakago-san, but how could he be so indifferent to the pressure that emanated from others? In the end, human relations was supposed to be about ideas clashing against one another.

In more violent terms, socializing was almost like an ideological war—so being indifferent, not caring what others thought of you, and not caring what you made others think... Couldn’t that be considered abandoning your “humanity”?

[In the first place, I don’t consider myself a pro at losing at all. I’m always trying as hard as I can, desperately trying to win, and it’s just that my efforts aren’t bearing fruit.]

Kumagawa-kun spoke with a grin on his face.

[Teppou-chan. Don’t tell me you believed all the sore-loser-like parting shots I gave to Anshin’in-san and the like? If so, that’s more embarrassing for me.]

“.....”

Teppou-san couldn’t laugh “Upupu” at such blatant sarcasm—she looked puzzled, her eyebrows furrowed.

However, it was only for a moment.

“Is that so, so you weren’t a pro at losing? Then that means you’re just a naive little amateur, huh,” she said, regaining her attitude. “In that case, why don’t I have you figure it out, Kumagawa-senpai? *A Russian Roulette conquest strategy.*”

[A Russian Roulette—conquest strategy?]

Even Kumagawa-kun.

Normally, at one remark, he’d absolutely throw back ten unpleasant remarks in return, but at this line, even Kumagawa-kun could only repeat the words back to her in confusion.

A Russian Roulette conquest strategy.

“That’s right. For this gamble that you absolutely must win, this game that you absolutely have to win—figure out a conquest strategy for Russian Roulette. I pulled it off once using the Skill I borrowed from Anshin’in-san—now figure out a way to pull it off without using any Skills at all,” said Teppou-san, once again picking up the revolver that had been lying on the desk like a writing implement up until now.

[Without any Skills at all... So, in other words, without using any special abilities, right?]

“Right. Your ‘All Fiction’ and Anshin’in-san’s ‘Lady Guitarist’ aren’t techniques that anyone can use, right? What I want to hear is a conquest strategy, a hidden trick that anyone can pull off, that anyone can accept.”

Not anything that only you can do.

Not anything that can only be done under certain conditions.

Nothing like that—a completely logical conquest strategy.

Teppou-san wrapped it up in an easy-to-understand manner.

[A logical conquest strategy...]

These were also words that Kumagawa-kun could only repeat back—and it was understandable. If the human known as Kumagawa Misogi had anything like a behavioral principle, then in a single word, it would be that

he was nothing but “illogical”—

“That’s right. If you manage to show me a conquest strategy for Russian Roulette that even I can accept—upupu, I’ll tell you then. The message for you that Anshin’in-san left with me.”



Saying that we'd probably need it to think, Teppou-san lent us, or rather, lent Kumagawa-kun, her revolver—but Kumagawa-kun didn't seem to have any particular interest in the shiny black object, passing it over to me like a baton in a relay race.

What, am I your personal assistant that carries stuff for you?

After we already had two people blow their brains out, it would be weird to only now start worrying about violating the Swords and Firearms Possession Control Law, but I was still completely on edge until we made it back into the Student Council office.

Teppou-san set the time limit to be when school closed for the day. Kumagawa-kun needed to figure out a conquest strategy for Russian Roulette before then—if he couldn't figure it out and make Teppou-san accept it, then after that, she would never convey the message from “Anshin'in-san”, no matter how much she was threatened.

No matter how much she was threatened, or rather.

Considering how dreadfully Kumagawa-kun could act against his opponents, Teppou-san was really impressive for raising such a dangerous flag, and I could even consider her frightening—was it bravery (*dokyou*), or just high tolerance (*doryou*)?

I wondered if Jakago-san had seen through that personality of hers and decided to leave her alone regardless—despite Jakago Aki's extreme lust for power, or perhaps because of it, she seemed to like those kinds of freewheeling people, with some form of longing towards them.

[About the Mona Lisa.]

It was in the Student Council chair previously used by that Jakago-san that Kumagawa-kun leaned back against, suddenly starting on a new subject.

[You know about it, right, Saki-chan?]

“Um, well... Yeah, if the Mona Lisa that you're talking about is referring to

the painting made by Leonardo da Vinci, then I do know about it...”

Since it was Kumagawa-kun that was bringing it up, there was the possibility that he was referring to some other completely different Mona Lisa, which was why I responded so cautiously.

“But I only know about it a little bit. Really, it’s only a little.”

[I have no objections to the fact that it’s a masterpiece that will remain in history—I’m not the kind of guy to raise quibbles against an all-around genius. But it gets the attention of a contrarian like me for a reason much more beautiful and brilliant.]

“A much more beautiful and brilliant reason? ...What could that be?”

[The fact that it’s on display at the Louvre Museum,] said Kumagawa-kun.

As if that response was some self-evident truth.

[Whether it’s a painting or a person, they each have their own suitable environments to be displayed in—but it doesn’t seem like Teppou-chan is the type of student that shines here at Suisou Academy. Don’t you think she has the kind of talent that would shine in a different environment?]

“.....”

I gulped at his words.

It was with those words that the former Student Council President had expelled a great number of students from this academy, and that fact was burned into my memory—I’d seen, from a vantage point closer than any of those officers, how they deemed any students not under their control as inappropriate for Suisou Academy.

Was Kumagawa-kun becoming like that, too?

Ever since he’d so destructively taken up the position of President, he had been quietly carrying out his duties without doing any of those sorts of actions or starting any scandals, but perhaps the time had finally come for him to indulge in his own power.

Did he intend to inherit the Suisou Academy Student Council President tradition of expelling the students he didn't like—that was what I was worrying about, but then.

[Well, if I'm saying that much, then I'm even more of a deep-sea fish that belongs even less in a water tank like this. To the point where I wouldn't even mind if I were expelled.]

From the way Kumagawa-kun continued, it didn't seem like that would be the case.

More realistically, Jakago-san and Kumagawa-kun were so different that, even if they had both taken up the position of Student Council President, it was hard to compare them...

"...Then."

I spoke up.

And finally asked this question after all this time.

"Then, Kumagawa-kun, why are you staying here at Suisou Academy? Even being the Student Council President, even though you know this place doesn't suit you."

[Hey, now. Aren't you the one who made me the Student Council President, Saki-chan?]

"Well, um, that may be the case, but..."

[Ahaha. The only place that's suited for me, the only place I can settle down in, is my own bed at home.]

In the end, Kumagawa-kun evaded my question in such a manner—it almost sounded like he was saying something incredibly pretentious, but your bed at home being a place you could settle down in was something that was true for everyone.

[However, someday I'll have to leave this Suisou Academy, too—it'll become a place hard for me to stay, forcing me to leave. But even so, it would be a boring turn of events if I was expelled because Anshin'in-san drove me out,] said Kumagawa-kun. [So maybe I'll think about it. A

Russian Roulette conquest strategy.]

The current time was after school, 4 p.m.

School closed at 6 p.m.—so there were about two hours until the time limit. In those two hours, Kumagawa-kun needed to figure out a conquest strategy that anyone could use to win Russian Roulette, a game that was a little too intense to be just a game.

However, it seemed he—finally found the motivation to do so.

“It seems like... an unreasonable demand.”

I sighed, glancing at the revolver I’d finally managed to let go of once we reached the Student Council office, having placed it on Kumagawa-kun’s desk.

“It feels like it’s the same level of difficulty as finding a conquest strategy for the game of roulette at casinos.”

[Although, theoretically, it isn’t as if casino roulette doesn’t have a conquest strategy.]

“You mean, double or nothing?”

Betting on red or black in roulette paid out double when you won, so if you doubled your bet whenever you lost, then in the end you’d break even on your losses, thus allowing you to gain victory.

However, in the end, it was something that was all just theoretical like the St. Petersburg paradox, and as long as people’s funds were finite (and as long as the casino had a limit on how much you could bet at roulette), the strategy could not actually be put into practice

[Well, even so, something like that should be fine in this case, right? It’s not like someone like her particularly cares about how effective it is.]

“Well... I guess that’s true.”

Since she already had a conquest strategy for Russian Roulette using whatever Skill she borrowed from that “Anshin’in-san” person, it’s not like she strongly desired a more realistic method—so in that sense, a

theoretical concept should be okay. In other words, Teppou-san was challenging Kumagawa-kun to a mental game.

“...If we’re talking about a conquest strategy for roulette, then there’s also the possibility of a skilled dealer that can aim the ball wherever they want, right? If you could do something like that in Russian Roulette by getting the bullet to land where you want it when you spin the cylinder, wouldn’t that be a way to assure your victory?”

[If it’s something that only a skilled dealer can do, then we can’t exactly say it’s something that anyone can do. I doubt controlling the rotation of the cylinder is something that everyone is capable of.]

Kumagawa-kun curtly rejected by suggestion.

He really didn’t understand how other people felt, huh.

[Actually, a skilled dealer that can aim the ball wherever they want is apparently just an urban legend, though.]

“Really?”

[Well, there may be someone that can actually do it, but in casinos, it’s after the dealer throws the ball that people make their bets, you see. That’s why it’s better to leave it to chance. If you aim for something, it’s possible that people will be able to read your intentions.]

“Ah...”

[Even in Russian Roulette, if you try to freely choose the location of the bullet, then people will be able to tell—that’s why fairness and soundness are expected of dealers.]

It was the first time that the words fairness and soundness sounded so dubious, coming from Kumagawa-kun’s mouth—well, I suppose that’s why in a lot of gambling manga, there are a lot of developments where they reveal some sort of unfairness that had taken place.

It was possible that a conquest wasn’t possible through a frontal attack—well, technically, using a gun was already on the illegal side of things, but Russian Roulette was surprisingly a straightforward, frontal-attack-like gamble.

In that case, was there a conquest strategy that could be figured out with that approach—and one that could be figured out in just two hours?

[Just to reiterate, the key point here is that it needs to be something 'anyone can do'. In other words, without using a Skill—or any sort of technique at all. So nothing like pretending to put in a bullet but not actually doing so, and nothing like switching it out with an empty gun.]

“Yeah, for sure.”

[The conditions,] said Kumagawa-kun.

He placed a sheet of white paper on top of his desk and picked up a fountain pen. That fountain pen was indeed a souvenir left behind by the former Student Council President. I didn't think that Kumagawa-kun actually knew how to use a fountain pen—once he used up all the ink, he would probably just assume it was a single-use item.

[It's probably a good idea to establish all the conditions—since, realistically, there's no real way to be able to survive for certain in Russian Roulette.]

“Yeah...”

Of course.

Putting a single bullet into the cylinder, placing the gun against your temple, and pulling the trigger—for something like that, assuming you weren't a magician, there was no opening that you could take advantage of.

[The revolver itself, in the end, is just a tool—like a deck of cards or a shogi board, it's nothing more than a tool. If there's anything that needs to be conquered here, it would be people.]

“People?”

[In other words, we need to conquer Russian Roulette as a one-on-one game, Saki-chan.]

“.....”

Russian Roulette as a one-on-one game.

In other words, was Kumagawa-kun trying to conquer the variation of Russian Roulette that was like a zero-sum game?

A form of Russian Roulette where Player A and Player B take turns pointing the revolver to their head and pulling the trigger—as long as a bullet was loaded in the revolver, it would have to shoot out at some point during the game.

In other words, the loser would die—or rather, the one who died was the loser.

Since it produced a victim no matter what, it was even worse than the single-player Russian Roulette, was what I was thinking—but that was probably why Kumagawa-kun thought that was more conquerable. His approach seemed to be, trying to be the one that lived.

“Hmm... Well, I suppose. If it’s Russian Roulette as a one-on-one game, then you could employ psychological warfare to pressure your opponent, so it sounds pretty good.”

「All right. Then it’s decided!」 said Kumagawa-kun, rising. 「In that case, why don’t we give it a go?」

“There’s no way we’re actually going to do it, right!?”

I found myself throwing in a *tsukkomi* before I realized it.

It really put me at a high risk of getting screwed over.

「No, no, we have to at least review the procedure first, right? Don’t worry, I’m not going to use actual bullets.」

Fortunately, Kumagawa-kun ignored my *tsukkomi*—but wait, in spite of his refreshing smile, he was kind of an adhesive guy, so there was a risk that he could hold a grudge.

“Review... But, why? I don’t really think we need to go out of your way to do it. It’s not like there are that many variations to a one-on-one Russian Roulette, right?”

「Those sorts of feelings is where my opening is. Or rather, it would be a problem if there were no openings for me—so I'm planning on conquering that from here on out. Saki-chan, please take out the bullets and bring that revolver over here.」

“Haah...”

Though I still didn't understand, for the time being I nodded without disobeying him. Considering he was making a high school girl of sound mind and body operate a gun, I was as shocked as ever with the rough way Kumagawa-kun treated others.

Since I'd seen Teppou-san do it many times over in the classroom of Class 2-3, reluctant though I was, I knew as much as swinging out the cylinder and unloading the bullets—although it was knowledge that would never be useful for the rest of my life.

「Thanks—um, so, I'll start off.」

Kumagawa-kun, deciding the order, took the disarmed revolver that I had brought to him and, with the same motion as he'd done when it had been loaded, pointed it at his temple and pulled the trigger.

No matter how much bad luck Kumagawa-kun had, there was no way an accident could occur with a revolver that wasn't loaded—and with a click, the sound of the empty gun rang out in the Student Council office.

「All right. Your turn, Saki-chan.」

“Right...”

Even as I wondered why I had to put up with this farce, it wasn't like I could go against the Student Council President as the General Affairs Manager, so I took the revolver and put it against my temple, just as Kumagawa-kun had done.

...No matter how much I understood that it wasn't loaded with any bullets, no matter how much I understood that I myself had been the one to take the bullets out of the gun, when I performed that action, I couldn't help but expect a bullet to “come out”.

Not to mention, just a little while ago I'd met a kouhai that could load a

gun with bullets without even needing to touch the gun or the bullets.

There was no way I wouldn't be afraid.

"Oh, well, whatever happens, happens!"

I shut my eyes tight and pulled the trigger.

Fortunately—or rather, as a matter of course.

Just as before, I heard the sound of the empty gun.

[Ahahaha. What's with saying 'whatever happens, happens', Saki-chan? That's the first time I've seen anyone say something like that.]

Kumagawa-kun seemed to be having a good time.

Just from looking at him, he seemed fairly innocent, but someone who heartily laughed at a person's cowardice could be nothing but wicked. At the very least, as the one being laughed at, it wasn't a pleasant feeling—it was like, who do you think I'm putting in all this effort for!

"There, hmph!"

I tossed the gun back at Kumagawa-kun—although, there probably weren't that many people these days that said something like "there, hmph!" either.

[Ahaha, don't get mad at me. If you do, it just feels like it's ruining something.]

...Ruining something?

Wasn't the phrase usually, "ruining your beauty"? No, but if I shot back with something that conceited, I would just be playing right into Kumagawa-kun's hands.

After that, Kumagawa-kun and I continued to take turns pulling the trigger—of course, the game ended without any bullets shooting out of the gun, with neither of us having our brains blown in.

"We tried reenacting... Or rather, 'impersonating' the game, but since we were never using any bullets, it's hard to say we were able to 'review' it."

Those were my thoughts.

Of course I'd been on edge in the very beginning, but by the second half of the game, I'd been able to totally relax—and this was the complete opposite of an actual match, wasn't it? In an actual game of Russian Roulette, the probability of the bullet shooting out went higher the longer the game proceeded, so the feeling of tension was supposed to actually increase.

[No, that's not true,] said Kumagawa-kun.

Well, that was probably how it was for Kumagawa-kun, who never felt anything like tension in the first place—was what I'd begun to say, but that didn't seem to be what he was getting at.

It seemed that Kumagawa-kun had actually gained something from the “review” we'd just done. This guy's sensitivity really was different from normal people.

[It was definitely worth doing this—solo Russian Roulette has that sense of completeness with no openings that an amateur could take advantage of, but when it's one-on-one like this, and perhaps even when there's more than two people, it seems like there's an opening I can use.]

“R-really?”

[Yes, absolutely.]

Kumagawa-kun grinned.

I couldn't hold back my surprise towards his overflowing confidence—looking at the clock, the time was only 4:15. Far from two hours, it had only taken Kumagawa-kun a matter of 15 minutes to figure out a conquer strategy for Russian Roulette.

Amazing!

Spectacular!

...Those praises would have to wait until after I heard what that strategy was. After all, I couldn't even count the number of times that Kumagawa-

kun let me down after developments like this.

Whenever Kumagawa-kun took on an attitude of overflowing confidence, he was usually just pretending—or rather, I'd never seen an instance where he hadn't been pretending.

"Would it be okay if you told me about it? The opening in Russian Roulette that you found."

[Hahaha. Should I? Should I tell you? I won't not tell you if you show me your panties, Saki-chan.]

"What an amazingly blunt demand..."

You don't see characters like that these days.

They show up even less than people that go "Whatever happens, happens!" and "There, hmph!"

[Well, sure. I already have the general idea of your panties, anyway, so I may as well move the conversation along. Besides, if I got to see your panties, then two hours would probably pass by in the blink of an eye.]

He was saying things that I no longer had any idea how to respond to, or how to even react to.

[Anyway, try thinking only about the case where it's one-on-one. As long as we set the parameter to be six total bullets, I think that two is the maximum number of people you can have. Right?]

"Yeah... Well."

It was true that three people would be too many—one person would only be able to pull the trigger twice. Although, saying it like that made it sound like you wanted to pull the trigger a lot.

And you can't split the shots evenly among four or five people, so the next possible number is with six people—and by that point, you could hardly call it a game. Since you were just pulling the trigger in order, it was basically just a lottery.

Er, well, if we were calling it just a lottery, then wasn't that basically true in

the case of the one-on-one, two-player version, too...?

[Of course, it's a conquest strategy that can still be used for three people and six people, but this is just to make the explanation easier—so, Saki-chan. During that 'review' earlier, did you happen to feel anything with an unnatural nuance?]

“Eh? Unnatural...”

Something outside of Kumagawa-kun's life?

Well, if you suddenly asked that, then there wasn't anything that immediately came to mind.

“No, nothing especially... It felt like the normal Russian Roulette procedure that you see in manga and stuff.”

[Right, it was the normal procedure—however, wasn't there one thing in that procedure that we left out?]

Saying that, Kumagawa-kun extended an arm to me.

It seemed he was asking me to hand him the revolver, as I'd been the last one to pull the trigger—and I did so.

[Like this.]

Kumagawa-kun pointed the gun at his temple.

[I pulled the trigger, right? And then you did, was our procedure.]

“Um... Well, that's true. Yeah. But was there something wrong with that?”

[You still don't get it? Basically, the point I'm getting at is that, in this game called Russian Roulette, we have someone who goes first and someone who goes second.]

At this point, I had a bad premonition.

Well, the bad premonition had been there from the start, but I was growing more and more conscious of it.

[And in this game, the person who goes second clearly has the

advantage!]

“.....”

[Because when the first player pulls the trigger and the bullet shoots out from the start, then the game's decided! The second player can win without even having to do anything—huh? What's wrong, Saki-chan?]

My expression had surely taken on a color of disappointment, as he paused in the middle of his explanation to ask me that question.

[Because you have the advantage going second, you just need to set a trap in the rock-paper-scissors or coin flip you do before the game to decide the order, was the sort of thing I was thinking for the conquest strategy... Is that no good?]

Aah, what a pain.

I guess I have to explain it, huh.

Since he'd come up with the logic of something like “It's if the bullet shoots out or doesn't, so a probability of one-half”, I felt keenly aware of how difficult a task it would be to explain probability to someone like him.

“Listen, Kumagawa-kun,” I began. “If there was an advantage or disadvantage between who goes first and who goes second, I would've pointed it out when you pulled the trigger on the first turn.”

[.....?]

If it were Hannyaji Usa, the girl skilled in mathematics that worked as the Treasurer under the Jakago administration, she probably would've started the explanation much more logically, but I could only say something like this.

However, since I was talking to Kumagawa-kun, this was probably better—for better or worse, appealing to his emotions was probably more effective.

Although it really was for better or worse.

[Hmm? Wasn't that just you unfairly staying quiet, Saki-chan, because

you knew you had the upper hand?]

“So you saw me as someone like that, Kumagawa-kun...”

It was quite a shock.

“Um, let’s see. I’d like to talk about it in terms of probability, but are you ready?”

[Not really.]

“In this case, in Russian Roulette, there’s no advantage or disadvantage whether you go first or second.”

There is none, I said again.

For the sake of emphasis—seeing as it didn’t seem to hit upon Kumagawa-kun at all, I knew it would be impossible to convince him without a strong assertion.

[Huh? But, isn’t going second obviously better off? It should be obvious mathematically, too, right?]

“Please don’t say the word mathematically as if it’s that simple... Um, let’s see.”

Well.

From here on out, it seemed like I’d have to explain everything properly—it was futile to keep appealing to his emotions like this. I had to quickly get him to understand, since the time limit was rapidly approaching.

“Let’s say that, for the player who goes first, the probability of them getting a Game Over in the first turn is one-sixth. That makes sense so far, right?”

If, at this point, he still tried to claim that it was one-half with whether the bullet came out or not, then I was just going to give up.

But Kumagawa-kun said, [Well, let’s go with that.]

Although his absurd arrogance bothered me.

Although it was extremely unpleasant.

“Turning that around, it means that, for the first player, Player A, the chance of them surviving on the first try is five-sixths. Does that make sense?”

“Hmm...”

Kumagawa-kun set down the gun on the desk for a moment and began writing something out in the air with his finger. With fingers on both hands. I was wondering what he was doing, and to be honest his movements were actually rather disconcerting, but I finally realized that he was simply subtracting one from six to get five.

...Eh?

Kumagawa-kun, can you not do subtraction?

[Okay, that's fine. It's five-sixths.]

“...So.”

I doubted that someone who apparently couldn't even do subtraction would be able to comprehend the mathematics that were about to come up, but I'd gotten on this train knowing it would be a trainwreck, so I couldn't exactly stop now.

“Five-sixths. As for what this number means, it's the probability of Player A surviving, and at the same time, it's the probability of Player B getting a turn to pull the trigger.”

[Yes... That's right.]

“Now, do you know the probability of the bullet coming out on Player B's turn?”

“Hey, hey, you shouldn't look down on people like that, Saki-chan. It's come up thousands of times already, hasn't it? The probability of the bullet shooting out in Russian Roulette is one-sixth.”

Oh jeez.

So he didn't even understand that much?

How did this guy even pass the entrance exams for Suisou Academy?

[Eh? Is there something wrong with that?]

“Kumagawa-kun, Kumagawa-kun. Look, Player A already pulled the trigger once, right? And after that, when Player B got the gun, the cylinder doesn’t get spun around again, right? In other words, the probability of the bullet coming out becomes, with a simple calculation, one-fifth, right? You get that, right?”

[Hmm, I dunno about that. The cylinder has spaces for six bullets, doesn’t it?]

“That has nothing to do with this...”

[One-fifth, huh... Well, maybe. Let’s just say that’s true for now, so that you can save face.]

“I don’t think I’ve done anything that requires me to have to save face, though...”

[I see. If the probability changes every time Player A and Player B pull the trigger, then we can’t judge things superficially. But realistically, how does that change anything? If the probability changes, then doesn’t that create an advantage or a disadvantage? Um.]

Kumagawa-kun started moving his fingers again.

I wanted to believe that he was just putting on a performance.

[One-sixth, and one-fifth, which one is more likely, again...?]

“.....”

I could’ve just told you, though.

But a good teacher will properly watch over a student’s learning, so let’s give him a little more time.

Although it wasn’t like becoming an instructor was an ambition of mine.

[Since it’s out of six and out of five, one-sixth should be more

advantageous. Oho, so you're saying that in this game, the person who goes first is better off! No wonder you gave such a weak reaction.]

"No, no..."

If we were talking about weak reactions, then my reaction right now had to be one of them.

"It's true that, if you could freely choose between probability of one-sixth and a probability of one-fifth, you should of course choose the one-sixth. But you can't freely choose that, right? Just think about it a little more. Really, it's only a little."

[Huh?]

It seemed he had no intention of thinking.

I reluctantly continued. "The first person has a chance of one-sixth, and the second has a chance of one-fifth—right?" I summarized.

Well, it was possible that saying that much was perfectly obvious to him and I didn't even need to explain it, but then again, it was possible that, if I didn't thoroughly go through obvious explanations like this, it wouldn't get through to Kumagawa-kun.

[Ah, yes. Indeed—but what's your point?]

"Player A has a one-sixth probability of getting a Game Over, and that's fine. That's obvious. But when it comes to the probability of Player B getting a Game Over, it's not simply one-fifth, is it?"

[Eh? Why?]

"Like I said. The probability of Player B getting a success, or in this case, a failure—in any case, the probability of the bullet coming out when Player B pulls the trigger is one-fifth, but before that, it's not certain that it'll ever come around to Player B's turn in the first place, right?"

[So you're saying...?]

"....."

Don't just go "so you're saying".

I'd prefer if you would actually think about it instead of trying just move my explanation along.

"The condition for it to become Player B's turn to pull the trigger is that Player A needs to pull the trigger and survive, right? Like you said earlier, if Player A gets a Game Over at the very beginning, then Player B can win without having to do anything."

[Oho. I see. And so?]

"So... Kumagawa-kun, you calculated it earlier, right. The probability of Player A surviving on the first try is?"

[Was it three-sixths?]

"It's five-sixths!"

Where the hell did the number three come from?

He had to be doing this on purpose, was what I was thinking, but I continued regardless.

"In other words, it's only after that 'five-sixths' probability occurs, and then that 'one-fifth' probability occurs, that Player B loses their life—and that's how it gets calculated."

It was here.

If Kumagawa-kun didn't understand this here, then it was surely impossible to convince him at all—though I'd begun to stop caring about the outcome, Kumagawa-kun closed his eyes and spoke.

[I understand,] he said. [So basically, the probability of Player B getting a Game Over comes from combining 'five-sixths' and 'one-fifth', right?]

"...Yes...?"

Fortunately, it seemed that he finally understood what I'd been trying to say—although, the use of the word "combining" bothered me.

"Combining" probabilities, in this case, meant—

「So we add 'five-sixths' and 'one-fifth'—let's see, get the lowest common denominator—'twenty-five out of thirty' plus 'six out of thirty' makes 'thirty-one out of thirty', or about 103 percent!」

103 percent.

Why would it go over 100 percent?

Was this supposed to be some temporary consumption tax?

“Why would you add them together? When you combine two fractions, you're supposed to multiply them, Kumagawa-kun. Not addition, but multiplication.”

「Oh, is that so.」

He didn't seem particularly surprised, nor did he seem to have any intention of contemplating this new information—he really wasn't a student worth teaching.

「Then if we multiply 'five-sixths' and 'one-fifth'—huh?」

Kumagawa-kun gave a quizzical expression.

「It ended up being one-sixth.」

“It did, didn't it?”

It finally got through to him.

It took some time, but we finally arrived at this point.

Maybe this was what it felt like to travel using the Seishun 18 Ticket.

“In other words, the conditions are the same. In Russian Roulette, whether you go first or second, there's no advantage or disadvantage.”

「This is a really confusing concept, huh—I more or less understand it now, but just for reference, let's keep going. If Player B also survives on their first try, then what's the probability for when it comes to Player A's turn again? That is, the probability of Player A getting a Game Over on their second try?」

“In that case, it's 'five-sixths' times 'four-fifths' times 'one-fourth'—of course, it should be obvious that it's 'one-fourth' because there could be one bullet in any of the four remaining spaces.”

[And 'five-sixths' times 'four-fifths' times 'one-fourth'—is also 'one-sixth'. And after that, Player B's second try?]

“Five-sixths' times 'four-fifths' times 'three-fourths' times 'one-third'—that equals?”

[One-sixth...]

Afterwards, Player A's third try is 'five-sixths' times 'four-fifths' times 'three-fourths' times 'two-thirds' times 'one-half', which is 'one-sixth', and Player B's third try is 'five-sixths' times 'four-fifths' times 'three-fourths' times 'two-thirds' times 'one-half' times 'one out of one', which is also 'one-sixth'.

In other words, in Russian Roulette, no matter at what timing you pull the trigger, the probability of the bullet shooting out is uniformly one-sixth.

[I see... Even though, on the very last turn, the bullet is going to shoot out for certain—even though it's a probability of one out of one—it's kind of weird that, after combining everything, it turns out to be one-sixth anyway. Numbers don't really go along with human intuition, huh?]

“I mean, that also goes for the things you say, too...”

In terms of math, this was really the basics of the basics in probability theory, but I suppose it probably wasn't unusual to feel an unnatural sense of discomfort from something like this.

It was the same as thinking that it was better to choose a lottery ticket earlier—it probably had to do with people believing in their ability to “choose”. “Having” or “not having”, “good luck” or “bad luck”—if you get too entrenched in that way of thinking, it'll probably get harder for you to understand probability theory.

You could even say it was the conflict between faith and logic.

“But in the end, numbers are what's right. The probability of one-sixth

stays the same, whenever the trigger is pulled.”

「Even if it's 99 percent impossible, as long as there's 1 percent of hope, I won't give up! So lines like that are only true in Weekly Shonen Jump, huh...」

“Yup. No matter how much it goes against human intuition, a 99 percent chance of failure is a 99 percent chance of failure. In the case of an actual success, it's most likely that the initial probability calculation was wrong.”

I was saying some pretty blunt things.

It seemed like something that Kumagawa-kun would normally say, but seeing as there wasn't much time until the time limit, we'd just have to share the work in a bit of team play.

When I noticed, the time had become 5 p.m. while we were going through our math lesson. There was only one hour left until time was up.

「.....」

Kumagawa-kun, as if thinking about something, picked up the revolver he'd placed on the table—and he gave it a good look.

What, had he gotten depressed after the clue he found for a Russian Roulette conquest strategy was crushed to pieces? If so, that didn't exactly sound good. Kumagawa-kun seemed like the kind of guy who'd start throwing things and leave if he lost his motivation...

Well, it didn't matter to me whether or not Kumagawa-kun just decided to leave for this particular case, but surely it would be pitiful for Teppou-san waiting in Class 2-3.

「Hey, Saki-chan.」

Kumagawa switched the gun over to his left hand and began to write something on the paper with the fountain pen. Since his writing was small, I couldn't tell what he wrote from my point of view.

「The probability theory you just taught me is pretty widely known, right?」

“Mm... Yeah, well, I'd say so.”

It pained me to have to assert that something Kumagawa-kun apparently didn't know was “widely known”, but I couldn't lie here.

“It's something you learn in middle school math. At least, all the students here at Suisou Academy should know it.”

[I see—then it should be safe to assume that Teppou-chan knows about it, too. If it's just common knowledge.]

“Yeah... Probably.”

Although I couldn't take any responsibility for that personality of hers—assuming he wouldn't make me take responsibility for his speculation, I nodded.

[Okay, and one more thing—is it safe to assume that everyone mutually thinks that that probability theory 'doesn't go along with human intuition'?]

“Mm...? What do you mean?”

[Ah, so, to make it easier to understand—if someone that had the same reaction as me showed up, if someone appeared claiming the same incorrect probability theory that I was saying, then most people wouldn't think, 'What the hell is this guy talking about?', and instead they'd think, 'Ah, he just doesn't get it. It's a common mistake that amateurs make,' right?]

“Mmm—well, sure. That sounds right.”

Well, I wasn't completely certain what point Kumagawa-kun was trying to get at, but what he was saying for now seemed right, so I agreed vaguely. Although, if I kept nodding along like this, I was afraid I'd be swept along into buying some expensive goods or something.

[So just to confirm. Basically, when someone declares that 'in Russian Roulette, whoever goes second has the advantage', even though it's obvious why that's wrong, it's not a completely unfounded assertion, either.]

“That sure is a roundabout way of saying things... If there’s something you want to ask, I’d prefer if you stated it as a clear question. But, sure, I’d say so.”

The fact that it was wrong couldn’t be changed.

But it was easy to see why people would get it wrong.

It was like that.

Since I was in a situation like this, I did my very best to correct Kumagawa-kun’s misunderstanding by explaining to him and convincing him about the proper theory, but normally, if this was just a conversation between normal classmates, I probably would’ve just ignored his claim and moved on.

It was, well, the kind of approach you took when dealing with people who believed in fortune-telling and the like—it wasn’t really worth debating.

[All right... Then, I’ll go with that.]

“Eh?”

[I’ve thought of a way. No matter what, there’s absolutely no real conquest strategy for Russian Roulette. But if it can be a conquest strategy that doesn’t necessarily have to be a sure-win strategy, then I have an idea. Since in the end, all I really need to do is beat that cheeky kouhai, Teppou-chan, in an argument—]

Kumagawa-kun stood up. He once again passed over the revolver to me—um, it was a problem if you treated me like this was my property, was what I was thinking, but in the meantime, I gathered up all the bullets I had taken out. We couldn’t exactly start the game without bullets once we were at the classroom. I felt it was a very “me” thing to do to be conscientious of things like this.

“You’ve thought of a way... But what kind of way? If possible, I’d like to hear it before we actually go...”

I wanted to hear and verify it before we went.

It wasn’t impossible that Kumagawa-kun had made yet another

misconception like before, or rather, the likelihood of him doing so was pretty high.

But Kumagawa-kun said, 「That's something you can look forward to at the actual scene,」 putting on airs. 「Because if I tell you now, you'll probably just deny it.」

“Eh? So it's something that I'll probably deny?”

So he didn't want to tell me because he didn't want to be denied...

But wouldn't that just mean that it would end with him being denied at the actual scene?

「No, no, even an incorrect theory can crush a correct one depending on how you make your argument. That's how I've been living all this time. I used my might to make whatever I wanted right.」

That was what Kumagawa-kun said.

Wasn't that basically what Teppou-san had said—the embodiment of him being a “professional at lying”?

Because what he was saying was pretty absurd.

“Then, at least, with that idea of yours, at least tell me how much confidence you have to beat Teppou-san in an argument. In terms of probability, how much?”

「In terms of probability?」

Kumagawa-kun spoke in that affected tone of voice.

「Then of course, it'll be 'five-sixths'.」

■ ■

「...And so, Teppou-chan. The logical conclusion is that going first in Russian Roulette is overwhelmingly disadvantageous, so if you can push going first onto the other person somehow when deciding the rules, the probability of you winning rapidly goes up. It's not a surefire victory, but it

becomes a much more advantageous battle for you, right?]

In the classroom of Class 2-3, towards Teppou-san who seemed to have been leisurely waiting, Kumagawa-kun disclosed his theory upon arriving—rather shamelessly, at that.

Of course, it was an argument that I had toiled away to deny just moments ago, and after being forced to hear it, Teppou-san seemed considerably disappointed.

“After all you said, I actually had high expectations from you, too,” she said. “Never thought you’d actually come back with such stupid logic. Was that the only answer you got to, after thinking for over an hour? Sukinasaki-senpai, didn’t you give him any advice?”

“I—”

Well, I did.

I totally did.

It was just that Kumagawa-kun was acting as if it “never happened”—it was like this even without needing to use “All Fiction”, so I should just keep my mouth shut.

“Though I have to admit that you did a good job restricting the Russian Roulette conquest strategy to only the one-on-one version of the game—it’s a good point to focus on, I’d say. But after that, you made a misunderstanding that a preschooler would make—”

[A misunderstanding? No, you have it wrong. This conquest strategy has no errors in it. I can even prove it mathematically.]

“.....”

At this, Teppou-san’s expression grew even stiffer—well, I’d had the same reaction, but hearing someone who didn’t understand at all use the word “mathematically” was especially unpleasant.

It was unpleasant.

But that meant it made you lose your cool.

In that case, was this what Kumagawa-kun was aiming for? In other words, there was more coming *after this*—

“Listen, Kumagawa-senpai. It’s easier to understand if you think of it like a lottery, but in this game, there’s no such thing as an advantage or a disadvantage. For example, let’s say that there are six balls in a box—”

[Ahaha. It’s useless to try and confuse me with an example like that. It’s a self-evident truth, the fact that pulling the trigger first is worse. Even in a lottery, it’s easier to win when you go first, right?]

“.....”

Teppou-san seemed utterly astounded at Kumagawa-kun, who wasn’t leaving any opportunity to get a word in edgewise, and her shoulders drooped.

She seemed to have given up.

“How am I supposed to report this to Anshin'in-san... Maybe because she’s so clever, idiots are actually unusual for her. What a pain.”

[Hey, hey, it’s fine to insult me, but could you not insult Anshin'in-san? Anyway, Teppou-chan, you’re taking the position that it’s not worse to go first, right?]

“I’m taking the position... Ah, well, sure. Yeah, yeah. That’s my position.”

Teppou-san nodded. That was careless of her.

[In other words, when you and I play Russian Roulette against each other, you don’t mind unconditionally going first, right?]

“.....? Well, yeah. I don’t mind.”

[Then, shall we try it? Saki-chan, the gun and bullets, if you please.]

“Ah, yes...”

I made to put the bullets back into the revolver before handing it over—but Kumagawa-kun stopped me there.

[Ah, it’s fine. I’ll load the bullets myself.]

How admirable of him.

“Hold on, don’t try to pull any tricks when you’re loading the gun or spinning the cylinder, Kumagawa-senpai—and, after putting the cylinder back, don’t try to verify the position of the bullet, either. When playing Russian Roulette for real, it should be obvious that you should try to make sure you don’t know where the bullet is.”

[I know, Teppou-chan.]

Kumagawa-kun lightly waved off Teppou-san’s concerns, and, with a practiced movement (how could it be practiced?), he placed a bullet into the cylinder.

One bullet—and then two, and three, and four, and five.

“Eh... Hey!”

There, Teppou-san lost her cool for the first time. As if by reflex, she stood up from her chair, slamming down on the table.

“What the hell are you doing? We’re playing Russian Roulette, right!? What’s the point of putting all the bullets in!?”

[I didn’t put in all of them. I just put five.]

Kumagawa-kun unconcernedly spun the cylinder and placed it back into the gun. That was also with a practiced motion.

And there was certainly a single bullet left in his hand.

[It’s not like Russian Roulette absolutely needs to be played with only one bullet, right? That’s just a basic rule, and it should be fine to play with two, three, four—or even five bullets. Even you implicitly acknowledged the existence of games with a pattern like that, after all.]

“.....!”

Kumagawa-kun passed over the revolver to Teppou-san, who'd been rendered speechless. Without any other options, Teppou-san took it—but she didn't make any move to place it against her temple.

Her trembling hands just gripped it tightly.

[Huh? What's wrong, Teppou-san? There are no advantages or disadvantages to going first or second in Russian Roulette, right? Go on, pull the trigger.]

Kumagawa-kun spoke—and then grinned.

With a horrifying smile, he grinned—huh?

Hold on, something was off.

Kumagawa-kun's words had been so fluid that I lost sight of when it happened—but I knew that his calculations had been wrong at some point. After all, if Teppou-san pulled the trigger here, there was a five-sixths chance of a bullet shooting out—without even needing to think about it, that was a pretty high probability.

And, at the same time, that meant that there was a one-sixth chance of it becoming Kumagawa-kun's turn, going second—and, of course, at that point, the probability of a bullet shooting out was five out of five, or 100 percent. And 'one-sixth' times 'five out of five' was just 'one-sixth.'

In other words, it wasn't true at all that there was no advantage or disadvantage.

There was five times the difference between the probability for going first and going second.

“.....”

Even I'd been rendered speechless.

Russian Roulette with five bullets in the cylinder certainly existed—a variation like that did exist. But playing it as a one-on-one game had to have been a blind spot—and that blind spot was what Kumagawa-kun had found!

“...Upupu.”

Teppou-san suddenly took on a fearless attitude. Even as her whole body trembled—she gripped the gun even tighter.

“Indeed, this is certainly a conquest strategy—you cunningly get me to promise something and then change the number of bullets. But there’s one major weak point.”

[A weak point? What is it?]

“It’s that you just handed a gun with five bullets to your opponent!”

With that, Teppou-san, quite literally faster than the human eye, swiftly pointed the gun at Kumagawa-kun—she lined up the shot and pulled the trigger.

With a five-sixths chance, a deafening gunshot erupted—

And then Teppou Uchi’s body was blown away.

Scorch marks ran up along her arm to her upper body, and the fragments of the exploded gun pierced into her everywhere—her limbs had gotten bent at hideous angles, and she had overturned the chair and the desk as she fell pitifully, face up towards the ceiling.

“What... what might you have done? Kumagawa-kun?”

[I just put in a screw into the barrel of the gun. You know, the one I used to destroy the classroom lock.]

In other words, he blocked the gun, forcing it into an accidental discharge—

“Did, did you do it when you were loading the gun?”

[Well, strictly speaking, it was after that. It was when Teppou-chan was all surprised when I put five bullets in. That’s something that anyone

should be able to do.]

“.....”

['Up until now' is the Russian Roulette conquest strategy I thought of—I told you, didn't I? In terms of probability, it's a 'five-sixths' chance.]

■ ■

It would be tedious to have to explain what exactly was off about Kumagawa-kun's conquest strategy, so I'll leave that out. To say the least, even if you put in as little as two bullets, the zero-sum game of Russian Roulette becomes disadvantageous to whoever goes first. The only time there are no advantages or disadvantages to going first or going second is when you play Russian Roulette with only one bullet.

Of course, if she'd been thinking calmly, Teppou-san could have raised an objection at the time. But, before she could object—being handed the blocked gun made her stop thinking. With the same ease one would have when shooting themselves in a society with gun rights, that revolver simplistically gave her the choice of “shooting Kumagawa-kun”.

That was surely another plan made by Kumagawa-kun.

By handing over a weapon with high offensive capabilities like a gun—by pushing it onto her, he induced her to attack, leading her to violence and, eventually, an accidental discharge. It was a very Kumagawa-kun-like way of thinking—or, more simply, a rather repulsive way of thinking.

Anyway, after that, there was something I had to do as Sukinasaki Saki, the General Affairs Manager of Suisou Academy's Student Council.

[When the Elite Prince Vegeta expects his wounds to be healed, but then gets denied treatment by Dende, it's kind of like, 'serves you right', don't you think?]

It was the extremely esoteric task of convincing Kumagawa-kun, who was saying something like that, to return Teppou-san to normal using “All Fiction”.

In any case, with this, it seemed that Kumagawa-kun had finally become able to stand at the start line of the game set by "Anshin'in-san"—he'd finally become able to press the game's start button.

Indeed, although he'd been made to dance in a rain of blood and a shower of flesh, frighteningly enough, his battle had not yet begun.

To put it in terms of the shonen manga he loved so much.

Kumagawa Misogi's defeat was only just beginning.

Anshin'in-san's Peace of Mind Terminal Introduction ①

Teppou Uchi? What kind of a name is that. It's shocking to me even despite being one of my terminals. Although, it's not like I choose terminals based on their names. My terminals can be divided into those born with it and those who acquired it, but in her case, she's among the former. I asked her to play the messenger in order to invite Kumagawa-kun to play a game, but, well, the fact that she wouldn't obediently carry out her duty was something I already knew (keep it a secret, okay?). I'm the type that loves when people disobey me, and I end up treasuring kids like that—well, Kumagawa-kun had a pretty bad time after getting involved with her, so let's say she did pretty well. In the first place, I'm the one who lent her "Lady Guitarist" and that pistol itself, so I suppose I share some responsibility in that.



Teppou Uchi
Class 2-3
Blood type AB
Seat number 18





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